

Interagency Wildfire Management Team
Meeting Notes
August 14, 2002

Carey Bare (Ecology Group, LANL) announced that Cochiti Pueblo has observed unusual amounts of tree mortality in their woodlands. In response to this, Joe Romero has organized a meeting of forest health specialists to discuss the situation and assess the impacts of these dead trees to wildfire hazards. Among others, Terry Rogers and Debra Allen-Reid will attend for the U.S. Forest Service and Randy Balice will represent the IWMT. In addition, Carey will organize a meeting of LANL forest management specialists to discuss the increased tree mortality that is occurring on LANL property.

Doug Tucker (Los Alamos County Fire Department) feels that IWMT is a stakeholder in the regional tree mortality that is currently occurring. The potential for extensive tree mortality has not been incorporated into current management practices. As a result, thinning prescriptions and other management actions need to account for this source of disturbance. Doug also announced that the County Council approved a Defensible Space Plan that will facilitate the thinning of trees and removal of dead trees that are standing on private property. Finally, Doug reported that contracts have been signed for the implementation of thinning and wildfire hazard reduction treatments in Bayo Canyon, Rendija Canyon and elsewhere.

Gene Darling (Emergency Management and Response, LANL) agreed that thinning and management prescriptions would benefit from added flexibility that allows for removal of drought-killed or beetle-killed trees regardless of whether or not the trees are marked. Also, Gene met with County and Forest Service personnel to discuss the status of the Los Alamos Reservoir. They agreed to maintain the reservoir in a low-storage condition so that it can be used as a catchment in the event of additional post-fire flooding that might descend from higher in Los Alamos and Quemazon Canyons. Finally, Gene reported that the fire hazard in the Los Alamos region has returned to „high% and „very high% levels. The situation has been exacerbated by a continuation of below-normal levels of precipitation. For instance, rainfall at the TA-6 weather tower for the month of July was 1.71 inches (59 percent of normal) and for the entire year has been 4.62 inches (48 percent of normal).

Rob Farris (Fire Protection Group, LANL) announced that work has begun on the thinning and reduction of fire hazards in Planning Area 5, which includes TA-3 and TA-58.

Randy Balice (Ecology Group, LANL) recently attended the Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting in Tucson, Arizona. During his travel to and from the meeting, Randy observed extensive mortality of native vegetation throughout the New Mexico-Arizona region. In the Sonoran Desert, manzanita and palo verde are succumbing to the drought. Further north, mortality of piñon and ponderosa pine, along with some juniper, were observed throughout the distributions of these species. During the annual meeting, ecologists and climatologists expressed concern that the continuation of the current drought is likely and that dieback of vegetation will continue.

Darrell Abeyta (Santa Fe National Forest) reported that the Forest continues to support the nationwide fire suppression effort. As a result, the local resources have been depleted. In spite of this, Darrell reported that the Forest Service has continued to support the thinning and wildfire hazard reduction efforts in Los Alamos County. Finally, Darrell announced that the snowpack for the upcoming winter has been predicted to be less than normal.

Dean Clark (Fire Management Officer, Bandelier National Monument) has observed normal vegetation developments in the forests above 8000 feet. Below this level in the ponderosa pine forests and the piñon-juniper woodlands, the

wildfire hazards continue to be „high% to „very high%. Given the low amounts of rainfall that we have received during this monsoon period, Dean anticipates a „second wildfire season% to develop during September and October of this year.

The next IWMT meeting will be at 9:30 AM on Wednesday, August 28, at TA-21, Building 210 in the Conference Room (142). The IWMT meets every other week and these meetings are open to the public. Contact Randy Balice (balice@lanl.gov, 665-1270) for further information, or to get on the distribution list for these meeting notes.